

REMARKS

In view of the above amendments and following remarks, further reconsideration of the rejections contained in the Final Office Action of November 2, 2006 is respectfully requested.

The Examiner objected to claim 8 as being indefinite. Changes have now been made to this claim so as to clarify the claim limitations. It is noted that the claim limitations are for example supported by side plates 53 and 54 as for example seen in Fig. 2, which have respective stepped portions engaged with respective recesses on opposite axial sides of the thin plate assembly 29A. It can be seen that the thin plate assembly is pinched together with the side plate between the pair of flexible thin plate retaining rings 51 and 52. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that the language of claim 8 is definite, particularly as now amended.

Independent claim 6 has been amended to include the limitations of claim 7. Thus, the independent claim now recites a deviation preventing member that is arranged between the outer circumferential proximal end side of the thin plates and the thin plate retaining rings so as to regulate motion of each of the thin plates relative to the thin plate retaining rings.

Independent claim 6 has been further amended to recite that the pair of thin plate retaining rings each have an approximate C-shape as seen in a cross-section taken along an axis of rotation and together form concave portions in which the outer circumferential proximal end side of each of the thin plates and the deviation preventing member are fitted so that the thin plate assembly is pressed on its outer circumferential side.

The Examiner rejected claim 7 as being anticipated by Mech, FR 2,650,048. However, Mech does not have a deviation preventing member as recited.

As described on page 9 of the original specification, a spacer 55 has a deviation preventing member fitted between the retainer rings 51 and 52 and the thin plates 29 so as to prevent rattling movement of the thin plates 29 relative to the leaf seal retaining rings 51 and 52. This spacer 55 can

for example be seen from Fig. 3. In this embodiment, it includes a plurality of convex portions 55a capable of elastically deforming when pressed. Thus the activating force of the spacer 55 urges the annular thin plate assembly 29A, on its outer circumferential side, against the surfaces of the concave portions 51a and 52a of the leaf seal retaining rings 51 and 52.

Thus, the deviation preventing member of the present invention urges the leaf seal in the radial direction using the effect of a plate spring. This prevents the leaf seal from rattling in the radial and axial directions.

The structure and function of the deviation preventing member is reflected in independent claim 6, above, by reciting the deviation preventing member arranged between the outer circumferential proximal end side of the thin plates and the thin plate retaining ring so as to regulate motion of each of the thin plates relative to the thin plate retaining rings. In Mech, there is no deviation preventing member that regulates the motion of the thin plates relative to the thin plate retaining rings.

The member 12 cited by the Examiner, seen in Fig. 5 of Mech, is in fact quite distinct from the deviation preventing member recited in claim 6. The member 12 is merely a constructional element of the leaf seal. It has no function of preventing deviation of the thin plates and there is not a deviation preventing member. Rather, it is a connecting plate that forms the ring-shaped leaf seal by having the proximal ends of the thin plates integrally fixed to the member 12. In its construction, each of the thin plates 4 is welded to the member 12 and then the member 12 is bent to form the leaf seal. Then the member 12 is fitted in the grooves 13a, 13b of the housings 5a and 5b. But there is nothing to prevent deviation within such housing.

By contrast, claim 6 requires the deviation member to regulate the motion of each of the thin plates relative to the thin plate retaining rings. No structure that accomplishes this function is present in Mech.

Claim 6 further distinguishes over Mech by reciting that the thin plate retaining rings each have an approximate C-shape so as to form concave portions in which both the proximal end sides and of the thin plates and the deviation preventing member are fitted so that the thin plate assembly

is pressed on its outer circumferential side. This structure is also not shown by Mech, as is clear from e.g. Fig. 5

Dependent claims 13 - 15 have been added so as to further distinguish over Mech.

All remaining claims in the present application have been amended to depend from independent claim 6, which has been amended to include the language of claim 7. As such, it may be seen that all claims in the present application distinguish over Mech for the same reasons as discussed above. Accordingly, all of the claims now pending in the present application are in condition for allowance. Indication of such is respectfully requested.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is submitted that the present application is now in condition for allowance, and the Examiner is requested to pass the case to issue. If the Examiner should have any comments or suggestions to help speed the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is requested to contact Applicants' undersigned representative.

Respectfully submitted,

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